DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 946 EA 009 424

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TITLE A Study of Candidates' Success or Failure in the 1975 New York City Community School Board Elections Using the Tri System Model.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, N.Y., April 4-8, 1977); Not available in hard copy due to light print of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Board Candidates; *Boards of Education; *Elections; Elementary Secondary Education; Models; Political Influences; Political Science; Questionnaires
IDENTIFIERS *New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the critical factors in board candidates' success or failure in the 1975 New York City community school board elections. Data from questionnaires answered by 208 candidates were analyzed according to the Tri System Model, an analytic framework that identifies the significant subsystems of a power system and predicts their ability to influence the decisions of the power system. The data indicate that a candidate's membership in religious organizations, as well as his name having appeared on the ballot in a previous New York City school board election, are strongly correlated with winning. (Author)

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A Study of Candidates' Success or Failure In The 1975 New York City Community School Board Elections Using the Tri System Model

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Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, April, 1977.

EA 009 421

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1975 Community School Board elections in New York City, 799 people filed petitions of candidacy. As a result of the elections, 288 individuals were elected to the thirty-two community school boards. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors critical to predicting candidates' success or failure in those elections using the Tri System Model as the theoretical base for the analysis.

School Board elections in New York City have been perceived by many to be a source of controversy (see Ticktin and Lurie), including charges of fraud and worse.

> The PEA experience in . . . . community school board elections leads us to conclude that instead of encouraging new participating in self-government and responsible citizenship, the way the elections were structured and conducted leads people to far greater cynicism, frustration and in some instances, rebelliousness (Seeley, P.2.).

One reason for this type of feeling was the lack of planning and preparation for these elections. It was clear that under the appropriate legislation both the Board of Education and the Board of Elections have certain responsibilities, but it was not clear as to who had the ultimate responsibility of initiating action. As a result of this lack of leadership a city-wide committee was formed to provide needed direction and leadership. This group - The Community School Board Elections Study Committee - is an informal consortium of over twenty civic, labor, parent and educational groups concerned with the process of school board elections. Included in the committee membership were the writers of this paper.

While this committee has no formal status, it has played an increasingly active role in school board elections. Two examples of the committee's accomplishments are its acting as a catalyst for the passage of legislation allowing mail registration for "Parent Voters" ; and its persuading the New York City Central Board of Education to establish a Fair Campaign Practices Commission (i.e. Special Circular #56, New York City Board of Education, 1977), to enforce a code of ethics for the elections.

The diversity of opinion represented in the committee usually precludes unanimity, but not in trying to determine ways to improve the electoral process. It was this concern that lead the committee to examine various aspects of the elections process in order to determine priorities for improvement. A questionnaire was prepared to collect data from all candidates, successful and unsuccessful, on the election process. This questionnaire sought information on the full range of the candidate's experiences, starting with his/her decision to run for office, the petitioning period, the actual campaign, and the final results. The committee was interested in using the data obtained from the questionnaire in order to gain insight into those factors influencing the political and electoral process. It was expected that the responses would aid the committee in its efforts to assist candidates in future school board elections, and that problem areas would be identified and sought to be corrected by legislative action. One example of this type of concern is in the financing of school board elections.

Under New York State Law, school board elections do not require financial disclosure by the candidates, nor is the State Board of Elections required to do any type of financial monitoring. Knowing how much money candidates spent, where this money came from, and other related information, would help the committee determine whether or not it should press for a change in the law.

The questionnaires were mailed out in the spring of 1976. Processing of the data took place during the summer and fall of the same year. Findings and conclusions presented here are based on the data collected by The School Board Elections Study Committee and made available to the writers.

Statistical and Methodological Treatment of the Data

Questionnaires were mailed to all 799 candidates; 201 candidates responded, along with another 43 that were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. A follow-up mailing was sent to a randomly selected group of 205 non-respondents with negligible success, resulting in a total usable return of 208. The investigators checked on the representativeness of the returns in light of known total population parameters. The criteria for representativeness included sample-population matching on the following:

1. Percentage of those winning the elections.
2. Percentage of male and female candidates.
3. Percentage of candidates from each community school district.

Inspection of the above variables disclosed that the maximum sample-population discrepancy did not exceed two percent.

The major criterion variable for evaluating the effectiveness of the Tri System Model was election outcome (i.e., winning or losing). Selected independent variables were assigned to the relevant Model categories. In order to determine relative contributions of within-category variables to estimate election outcome, a Step-wise Multiple Regression procedure was followed. Specifically, comparisons of the standard partial regression weights (i.e., beta weights) permits the identification of relative, within-category variable contributions to the prediction of election outcome.

The only variables that were entered into the multiple regression equation were those which had statistically significant correlations ($P \leq .05$) with election outcome. Beta weights were compared only for those regression equations where a statistically significant ($P \leq .05$) multiple R was produced. For all factors where one or more components vs. election-outcome correlations were significant, Tables 1 - 4 depict the proportion of election outcome variance associated with the highest single component and with the best weighted combination of significant components.

The Tri-System Model

Proposed Link Between Candidate's Reported Campaign Activities and Their Election or Non-Election.

The conceptual framework for this study is derived from the Tri System Model. This Model (Lutz and Iannoccone, 1969) draws on the works of Homans (1950), Loomis (1960), and von Bertalanffy (1950). It provides a framework for identifying and analyzing the significant sub-systems of a power system and

for predicting their ability to influence the decisions of the power system.

The Model, briefly summarized here, is depicted in Figure I. The upper left quadrant of the figure lists the concepts to guide the analysis of interpersonal behavior. This behavior is understood to be an interplay of the three elements of human behavior consisting of activity, interaction, and sentiment in face-to-face situations. For the purposes of this study, an activity is defined as any attempt (oral, written, or non-verbal) by one person to influence the decision of a second person; an interaction is the second person's response stimulated by the previous activity; the sentiment is the positive or the negative feeling experienced by the activity emitter as a result of either the agreement (positive) or the non-agreement (negative) of the second person.

Givens refers to the setting of the face-to-face situations in which the interpersonal behavior occurs. Actors exercise virtually no control of the Givens (e.g., work stations, cultural norms).

Norms represent a sub-system's expectations for the behavior of each of its members. While the elements of human behavior take place between individual persons at any one given time, their continual reoccurrence between the members of a group or sub-system in time develop the collective sentiment or the norms according to which the sub-system can influence the behavior of its individual members.

In the lower left quadrant of Figure I are listed the concepts relevant to an understanding of the behavior of given groups or sub-systems. Sub-systems may also be referred to as points of tangency when they are linked with or aim

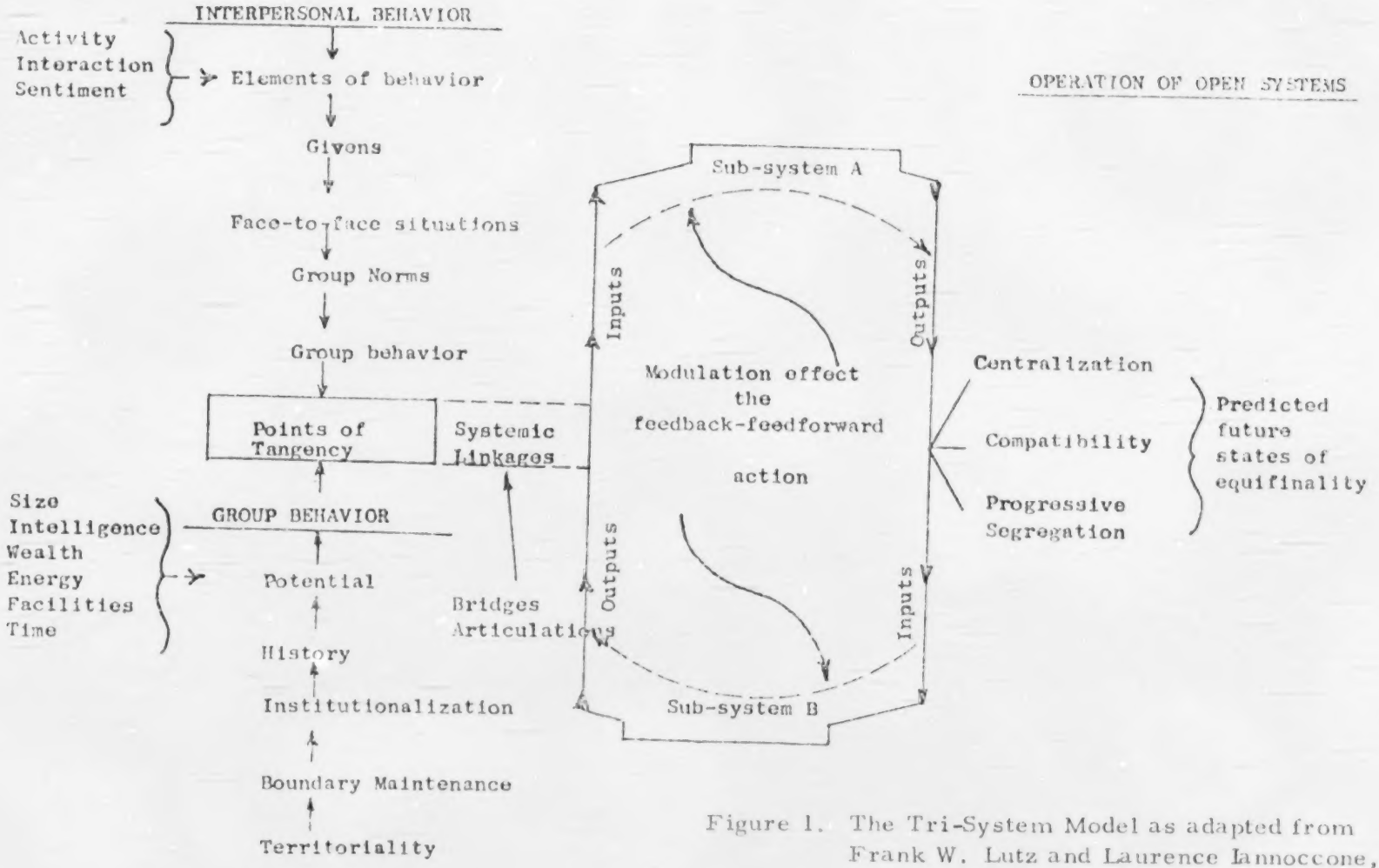

Figure 1. The Tri-System Model as adapted from Frank W. Lutz and Laurence Iannoccone, Understanding Educational Organizations: A Field Study Approach (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company), 1969.

activities toward the power system's legal decision-making group or sub-system. Points of tangency are linked both with one another, as well as with the legal decision-making group by a communications network called systemic linkages. These linkages occur in two forms:

(1) an articulation occurs when the same person holds membership in more than one point of tangency (e. g., John Smith, a member of Rotary, is also a member of a parents association);

(2) a bridge occurs when each of several given points of tangency contributes a member to a third sub-system (e. g., John Jones, a member of the American Legion, and John Smith, a member of Rotary, confer at a parents association meeting).

Data relevant to a point of tangency (or sub-system) may be analyzed in terms of the concepts of potential, history, institutionalization, boundary maintenance, and territoriality.

Potential refers to the sub-system's assets for achieving its objectives. These assets are the size, the intelligence, the wealth, the energy, the facilities, and the time available to it for achieving these objectives.

Size refers to the number of sub-system members. Intelligence refers to the basic power of understanding and mental acuity available to the sub-system. Wealth refers to the available financial resources. Energy refers to the sub-system's capacity to work. Time refers to the number of hours, days, weeks available to the sub-system. Facilities refers to the tools (i. e., duplicating machines, typewriters, office space) for the sub-system to accomplish its objectives.

The larger a sub-system's potential in relation to the potentials of competing sub-systems the greater the probability that its efforts to influence will be successful.

History refers to the identification of the appropriate points in a sequence of events related to an issue when a given sub-system's attempts to influence the legal decision-making group are more relevant than they would be at other points in the sequence of events.

Institutionalization refers to the extent to which a sub-system is formalized. The greater the degree of a sub-system's institutionalization, the greater the likelihood that its future behavior will be consistent with its past.

Territoriality refers to a decision-making area viewed by a given sub-system as belonging to it. Territoriality may be of two types: legal and claimed. Legal territoriality is based on the law; claimed territoriality on a sub-system's assertion of ownership of a given decision-making area.

Boundary maintenance refers to a sub-system's act of protecting its territoriality whether legal or claimed.

The upper and lower right quadrants of Figure I list the concepts used to guide an analysis of the relationship of a given sub-system to the power system. As each sub-system receives inputs (i.e., the interactions and the sentiments) from other sub-systems, its outputs (i.e., the activities emitted by it to other sub-systems) are modified by the inputs from these other sub-systems. This process of output modification is called the modulation effect. The modulation effect explains the movement of a given sub-system toward one of three possible future relationships to the power system. These

relationships, called predicted future states of equifinality, are:

- Compatibility (i. e., able to work with other sub-systems);
- Centralization (i. e., emerging as the dominant sub-system);
- Progressive segregation (i. e., gradually separating itself from the power system).

Application of the Tri-System Model to An Analysis of Candidates' Reported Campaign Activities

Each candidate, together with his/her sponsoring group is assumed to be a point of tangency. Each of these candidates is therefore one of a number of points of tangency emitting activities (i. e., posters, palm cards, newspaper ads) aimed at influencing the eligible voters in the community school district. The eligible voters in each community school district are assumed to be a collective legal sub-system.

The legal sub-system owns the (legal) territoriality consisting of the right-to-vote for one or more school board candidates on election day.

The Model associates the comparative magnitude of the potential mobilized by each point of tangency (or candidate) directly with his/her success in influencing the legal sub-system (or the electorate) to vote for that candidate on election day. Since the data produced by the questionnaire do not lend themselves to the strict quantification of the potential for purposes of comparison, the statistical procedures described in the previous section were applied. Accordingly, it is likely that a comparison of the potentials of the winning candidates with those of the losing candidates will reveal significant differences in favor of the campaign activities of successful candidates.

Application of the Model to the Statement of the Problems

The problems as formulated in terms of this Model are:

1. How are the comparative potentials of the points of tangency (i. e., candidates) related to their ability to influence (i. e., to be elected by) the legal sub-system?

2. How can the factors in potentials (i. e., the size, the intelligence, the wealth, the time, the energy, the facilities) available to the influential(elected) points of tangency be refined?

Comparison of the Potentials of the Influential Points of Tangency to the Potentials of the Non-Influential

An examination of tables 1 thru 4 indicates that variables relevant to the factors of size, intelligence, and facilities were found to be significantly associated with the campaign activities of the winning candidates. On the other hand, none of the variables relevant to the factors of wealth, energy, and time were found to be significantly associated with the successful or the unsuccessful outcome of campaign activities.

Size

Of the twenty-four variables previously coded as belonging to the factor size, the best single variable, significant at the .001 level, is a winning candidate's membership in religious organizations. Next in significance at the .01 level are the following variables indicating the candidate's been sought out or himself/herself seeking out an interview with a view to endorsement by -

- civic organizations
- parent associations
- parochial school groups
- religious associations
- labor unions.

On the other hand, the following size variables were found to be unrelated to a winning candidate's future elections. Holding office in -

- religious organizations
- civic organizations
- professional organizations
- parents organizations
- union groups

Intelligence

Of the five variables previously coded as belonging to the factor intelligence the sole significant variable (.001 level) is a winning candidate's having appeared on the ballot (in a previous) New York City School Board Election.

On the other hand, the following intelligence variables were found to be unrelated to a winning candidate's future election:

- level of formal education completed
- previous years of service on any New York City School Board
- the number of previous appearances on the ballot for a government or party office.

Facilities (Mixed)

Facilities (mixed) refers to the fact that while the reporting school board candidates had accepted assistance from slates, these same candidates had functioned as independents. Hence the category mixed to indicate that the sources of their available facilities were both from slate and non-slate origins.

Of the twenty-eight variables previously coded as belonging to the factor facilities, the best single variable, significant at the .01 level, is the distribution of literature by a slate. Next in significance at the .05 level are:

- assistance by the slate in collecting signatures
- assistance by the slate in placing newspaper ads

On the other hand, the following illustrative facilities (mixed) variables were found to be unrelated to a winning candidate's future election:

- phoning voters on election day
- direct mailings
- coffee klatches

Facilities (Independent)

The facilities (independent) denotes the winning candidate's self-reliance for mobilizing facilities rather than his/her reliance on a slate.

Of the thirteen variables previously coded as belonging to the factor facilities (independent), the single best variable (.01 level) is the securing of sound equipment. Next in significance (.05 level) is:

- the making of phone calls before Election Day as part of the campaign
- the securing of volunteer workers

In order to apply the concept potential to an analysis of the assets mobilized by a given candidate, it seems desirable to define the factors constituting potential in terms relevant to New York City Community School

Board elections. Accordingly, the following terminology is proposed for assisting future researchers in their examination of elections in this context.

Wealth, energy, time, appear to be irrelevant to predicting the election of candidates:

No variables related to the factors of facilities (provided exclusively by the slate), time, energy, wealth were found to be significantly related to the candidate's being a winner.

CONCLUSIONS

The final test of the strength of the relationship between the concepts potential and influence would need to occur in the context of an N larger than the one available to this study. In addition, the fact that the data on campaign activities are drawn from questionnaires rather than from direct observation may raise some methodological concerns. Nevertheless, within the limitations presented this postulated link previously tested by Cuttitta (1971) seems to be conformed by this study.

What does seem relevant to predicting candidates success is:

- member in religious organizations (size):
- previous presence on a ballot in New York City "School Board elections (intelligence):
- distribution of literature by a slate (facilities);
- securing of sound equipment (facilities).

In terms of the Model, it is understandable that membership in religious organizations be the key to size. The Tri System Model attributes major impact to the concept sentiment as the basis for the ultimate resolution of the relationships given sub-systems to the power system. Access to the support of the members of religious organizations who are sentiment-oriented should provide access to community influence.

The idea that a winning candidate's intelligence can be best evaluated (in terms of the elections to community school districts) by the fact of the person's previous presence on a ballot in New York City school board elections, also, is consistent with Model's postulate that positive sentiment (i. e., compatability) occurs in face-to-face interactions over a period of time. A previous election effort is likely to produce a memory of positive sentiment with respect to the candidate.

Facilities can (in the same way) be analyzed by the facts of sound equipment's availability and literature distribution by a slate. These refinements are consistent with the essence of the Model's approach to predicting the relationships of sub-systems to the power system through the modulation effect.

The use of sound equipment permits instant exchange of inputs and outputs. The modulation effect in this case explains satisfactorily the stimulation and reception of the sentiment among interacting publics using so invasive a facility as sound equipment.

TABLE I.

Correlations and percent of election outcome variance accounted for by the single highest variable and the best-weighted combination of significant variables for the concept size.

	Best Single Variable	Combined Significant Variables
Correlations:	.257	.455
Percent of Variation Accounted for:	6.6	20.7

TABLE 2

Correlations and percent of election outcome variance accounted for by the single highest variable and the best-weighted combination of significant variables for the concept intelligence. *

	Best Single Variable	Combined Significant Variables
Correlations:	.289	- - -
Percent of Variation Accounted for:	8.3	- - -

* Only one variable is significant.

TABLE 3.

Correlations and percent of election outcome variance accounted for by the single highest variable and the best-weighted combination of significant variables for the concept facilities (mixed).

	Best Single Variable	Combined Significant Variables
Correlations:	.318	.430
Percent of Variation Accounted for:	10.1	18.5

TABLE 4.

Correlations and percent of election outcome variance accounted for by the single highest variable and the best-weighted combination of significant variables for the concept facilities (independent).

	Best Single Variable	Combined Significant Variables
Correlations:	.496	.580
Percent of Variation Accounted for:	24.6	33.6